

The incoming tide allowed only a hasty internal examination. This revealed that the whale had died only hours earlier. Massive haemorrhage about the mandibles showed that the lower jaw had been drastically fractured while the animal had been alive. This injury may have occurred prior to the stranding of the whale or during its subsequent thrashings as it stranded. A morbid possibility that should not be overlooked is that souvenir hunters had broken the jaw while extracting teeth when the whale was alive but unconscious.

The eyes were large (3 cm in length) in proportion to the total bulk of the whale and of a vivid opalescent green—adapted probably for deep diving. On the other hand the mouth appeared ridiculously small—the length of the lower jaw being less than 10 cm (from the tip of the jaw to the corner of the mouth). It is difficult to imagine this type of whale catching large squid or fish; possibly it feeds on smaller species that school in open water.

Photographs were taken and the carcass was reclaimed by the spring tides which had earlier deposited it on the beach.

—KIM AKERMAN, Derby, W.A.

First Australian Record of the Pintail Snipe (*Gallinago stenura*).—On December 28, 1976 Dr. and Mrs. Alan P. Johnson found a recently dead and partly eaten snipe in their garden at Port Hedland on the north-west coast of Western Australia. After examining its tail feathers they concluded that they had the first Australian specimen of *Gallinago stenura* (Bonaparte). This species is not to be confused with *G. megala*, known as Swinhoe's Snipe everywhere outside of Australia and in the first edition of the RAOU Checklist, but called the Pin-tailed Snipe in the second edition and Chinese Snipe in the third.

Dr. and Mrs. Johnson kindly donated their specimen to the Western Australian Museum (registered number A14652). Its measurements in millimetres are: wing 133, tail 51, bill (total culmen) 69, tarsus 33. It has 24 tail feathers, the outer seven on each side being very narrow (the outermost have a maximum width of 2.0 mm).

G. stenura and *G. megala* are generally regarded as indistinguishable in the field. In the hand they are readily separated on characteristics of the tail. *G. stenura* has more tail feathers 24-26 (vs 20-22), including 10 (rather than 8) wide or normal central rectrices. The outer tail feathers are much narrower in *stenura* than *megala*; Hartert (*Die Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna*, vol 2, pp. 1663-5) gives a width of 1.0-1.5 mm for the outermost rectrix in *stenura*, and 2.5-4.0 for *megala* (he is apparently measuring towards the tip rather than at the widest part of the feather). It is also evident from Hartert's data that *stenura* is slightly smaller than *megala*, e.g. wing 129-137 (vs 135-149), tail 48-52 (53-60), bill 58-67 (61-70). The chestnut band across the central rectrices of the present specimen of *stenura* is darker than in our series of *megala*, and the subterminal band is wider and darker (black rather than grey).

Gallinago stenura has a more westerly distribution than *G. megala*. It breeds in Siberia and extreme north-eastern Russia and winters in north-eastern Africa and southern Asia, eastwards to long. 121°E (Formosa, Celebes and Flores). *G. megala* breeds in Siberia west to long. 81°E and winters from eastern India and Sri Lanka eastwards to the Philippines, western Micronesia and the Bismarcks.

According to Smythies (*The Birds of Borneo*, p. 210), *stenura* is the commonest snipe in western Borneo, and *megala* the commonest in northern and eastern Borneo, i.e. east of long. 115°E. As this meridian passes through the north-west of Western Australia, it is not surprising

that *stenura* has been recorded in the North-west Division but not yet in the Kimberley Division (where *megala* is a moderately common summer visitor). Moreover the paucity of swamps in the arid North-west Division makes it much less attractive for *megala* than *stenura*. The Pintail Snipe, as Smythies observes, is "more typically a bird of grazing grounds and grasslands where the ground is not so soft."

—G. M. STORR and R. E. JOHNSTONE,
Western Australian, Museum, Perth.

Black-headed Gull at Geraldton.—There is a flock of about 60 Silver Gulls, *Larus novaehollandiae*, which regularly visits the grounds of the Geraldton Senior High School. While watching these birds alternately wheeling over the buildings and resting on the roofs, I noticed among them a gull of a different species. The following description was made while the gulls remained in the area for about half an hour. Observation was at ranges down to about 15 m in good light, but without the aid of binoculars.

Head and upper neck sooty black, sharply abutting the pure white lower neck. The white extended down the breast and belly to the tail and rump. The back and most of the wings, both upper and lower surfaces, were ashy-grey, and decidedly darker than the corresponding silver-grey areas of the Silver Gull. A narrow band along the leading and trailing edge of the wing, above and below, was white. Near the wing tip on the under surface there was a small strip of black, but much less extensive than in the Silver Gull, and without the white "mirrors". The bill was dark, probably black, and shorter and stouter than in the Silver Gull. The eye had a white iris and there was a conspicuous narrow white ring around the eye. The legs were dark, probably black. The bird was clearly a little shorter than the Silver Gull, and slightly plumper. In flight its wing beat was noticeably faster and stronger. Its general behaviour was identical with the Silver Gulls with which it was resting and flying. No call was heard. The main features of this description were checked and confirmed by Mr. Ray Harwood and Mr. Tony Little of Geraldton, to whom I pointed the bird out. Although flocks of gulls were watched carefully at the school and for several miles up and down the coast for several days I did not sight it again.

From W. B. Alexander's *Birds of the Ocean* it seems that the gull can be identified as an adult Chinese Black-headed Gull, *Larus saundersi*, in northern summer plumage. It normally inhabits rivers and estuaries in eastern Siberia, China, Korea and occasionally Japan and Taiwan. It seems that the gull may have arrived in Geraldton as the result of following a ship: the harbour is about 1 km from where the bird was seen. The Geraldton Port Authority informed me that four ships had entered port in the previous five days: one from Yokohama, Japan via Singapore; one from the Middle East and two from Australian ports.

The Chinese Black-headed Gull has not previously been reported in Australia. However, on at least two occasions other black-headed gulls have been recorded in the south west of Australia. One was made by Mr. Timothy Dixon (*Emu*, 58, 1958: 71) of a bird seen in Bunbury in 1957. This was identified as the American species, Franklin's Gull, *Larus pipixcan*, and corroborated by the late W. B. Alexander. The other record is in the RAOU Newsletter, No. 27, June 1976, in a report of the W.A. branch of the RAOU when Mr. Gerry Nicholls exhibited three photographs of a bird seen at Geraldton at the end of March 1976, and which he identified as Franklin's Gull. It is quite possible that the bird seen by Nicholls and by me was the same individual.

—LINDSAY E. SEDGWICK, Geraldton.